

FEDERAL PERSONNEL GUIDE

WEEKLY NEWS UP•DATETM

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PAY RAISE GIVE BACK FOR CIVIL SERVANTS?

If you're wondering what happened to that last little pay raise Congress voted for federal workers — the .5 percent increase that was added retroactively to January 1 as part of the fiscal year 1984 budget reconciliation — it won't show up in your pay checks until President Reagan signs an executive order making new pay tables official.

Administration officials insist that the Maximum Leader is going to sign that order. But, for the paranoid among us, there is a move afoot in Congress to rescind the raise. As the Senate draws its bead on the FY 1985 budget reconciliation bill, Majority Leader Howard Baker, R-TN, has offered an amendment that calls — among other things — for federal workers to give up the raise. (The measure also calls for repeal of the retirement increase offset for military retirees who are federal civil service employees).

It is practically certain that the Baker amendment will pass the Senate, for technical reasons. But, insiders say, "Relax, don't count the pay raise out."

The reason the measure will pass is that the basic Baker amendment is part of a complicated Senate procedural scheme designed to get around limited debate rules. The bottom line is that it will pass.

But Senate staffers insist that the pay repeal will be the first thing knocked out of the bill in a conference committee meeting between House and Senate members to iron out differences in budget legislation.

For those who are in doubt, remember that this increase, however modest, also applies to the Solons themselves. So it isn't too likely that Baker's colleagues will give it up.

As one OPM official put it: "the Baker amendment is fine with us, but Congress wants to give federal employees and themselves a raise."

Another administration official pooh-poohed the amendment, calling it "quiescent."

Meanwhile, the FY 85 reconciliation bill — Congress' final spending plan for the year — is drifting in a Senate legislative limbo. The House passed its version weeks ago, but the Upper Chamber is still casting about for a way to get the measure to a vote.

Due to the sometimes crazy way they do things up on Capitol Hill, the budget plan is most likely to be voted on as an amendment to the Federal Boat Safety Act.

PAY EQUITY, MERIT PAY— MERGER OR COLLISION?

It depends on how you look at it?

Legislation to reform the government's merit pay program hit a snag last week as the House compensation and employee benefits subcommittee added a controversial "pay equity" provision to merit pay reform legislation.

Or, the cause of pay equity got a big boost last week as the House compensation and employee benefits subcommittee added a mandate for a federal pay equity study to merit pay reform legislation.

Either way, the pay equity measure, offered by subcommittee Chairman Mary Rose Oakar, D-OH, raised howls from the Senate — which has already approved the merit pay reform — and threats of veto from the administration, which is flatly opposed to the "pay equity" legislation.

Backers of merit pay reform are holding their breath as the now-linked measures must make their way through the full Post Office & Civil Service Committee, then through the full House of Representatives, then through a House-Senate conference committee, then past the President's veto stamp.

Lurking beneath the merits of the issues — a skillful move by Democratic Party strategists to capitalize on the so-called "gender gap" and embarrass the administration and the Republican Party in a presidential election year.

Here's the story on how these two hot issues got tangled together, and what the future pitfalls are.

As we have reported in detail in the past (see May 7, 1984 FPG WEEKLY NEWS UP•DATE for latest summary), Congress, the administration and civil servants are agreed that the present merit pay system is a walking disaster. The three sides hammered out agreement on a reform bill in the Senate, and action shifted to the House. Observers there expected the major points of disagreement to center on technical details, such as the exact amount of bonuses to be awarded to superior performers.

Meanwhile, however, Rep. Oakar and other House activists on women's issues have been pushing hard on the so-called "pay equity" issue. (See April 9, February 20, 1984 issues of FPG WEEKLY NEWS UP•DATE for background.) Basically, pay equity — which used to be called "comparable worth" — focuses on different pay levels paid

Continued on next page

to occupations which are predominantly male and those which are predominantly female. (The concept can also be extended to other indexes, such as race, age and so forth).

The theory underlying pay equity is that the differences in pay levels are caused by gender-based value judgments. In other words, that more value is given to, say, driving a garbage truck because men do it than to nursing, because women do it. Proponents of pay equity believe that job analysis and classification systems can eliminate such sex-based judgments.

Unfortunately, the term also gets mixed up with straightforward sex pay discrimination — that is, paying men and women different pay for exactly the same work.

In any case, the administration opposes pay equity, arguing that the market economy best makes judgments about the value of work, not analysts, whom it claims will simply impose their own values.

All of this came together when Oakar successfully added to the merit pay bill a provision that requires the administration to conduct an "indepth study by the Office of Personnel Management of pay practices in the federal government to determine compliance with pay equity principles."

Why does anyone oppose a study? Well, for one thing, because such studies have been used in the past by activists as the basis for law suits against employers. The State of Washington is appealing a big one it lost recently (and the Reagan administration is supporting that appeal).

Opponents of Oakar's measure fear that it will expose the federal budget to enormous liabilities if some federal judge decides that pay rates for female-dominated job classifications should suddenly be hiked. Male trades and craftsmen also fear their pay would be cut to match lower paid jobs.

Opponents also claim the concept is just too vague.

As one OPM official put it, "Nobody knows what the hell that [study mandate] is supposed to mean. Most people don't have the slightest idea of what comparable worth, or pay equity, is."

In any case, the linkage between the two measures opens up new legislative pitfalls.

"There's just no way we can accept it," lamented a senior staffer on the Senate Civil Service Subcommittee. "Everyone is agreed on merit pay — there are problems, and everyone is pretty much agreed on a solution. But pay equity — that's like throwing an ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] on the bill."

The politics of the matter complicate things even further.

On the one hand, the move forces Republicans and the administration into the worst possible procedural posture. Since the Senate has already passed the bill to which it is attached, there will be no chance for hearings or floor debate — thus no way of icing it or laying out detailed opposition.

If the measure passes the House (see below) the first real cut the Republicans will get at it will be in a conference committee, where there is little debate and lots of horse-trading. In short, Republicans would be forced to accept some form of the pay equity measure or come out baldly against a "women's issue" in an election year.

Likewise, if the bill survived conference, the President could only veto a "women's bill" or swallow an idea totally unpalatable to his administration.

On the other hand, the Oakar amendment presents House Democrats with a prickly pear of their own. House civil service committee chairman William D. Ford, D-MI, likes to get civil service bills to the House floor under rules that strictly limit amendments. The reason is obvious — lots of folks are lurking in the wings with lots of amendments to any civil service bill, to do things like shake up the retirement system, cut pay, and other goodies.

The big question is — can Ford ram such a controversial measure onto the floor without allowing debate and amendment?

Aside from the pay equity issue, the administration also has complaints about other features Oakar added to the merit pay bill, especially a provision that would allow merit pay employees to appeal a rating of less than "fully satisfactory" to the Merit Systems Protection Board.

We've given up guessing on what Congress might do on any given day. But one thing is sure — the sure thing that merit pay reform as was two weeks ago is gone. The open question is whether it will carry pay equity along with it, or end up in the ashes of a fast-fading 98th Congress.

PAY GIVE BACK FOR POSTAL WORKERS?

The Postal Service is asking postal workers to give back from 10 to 15 percent of their pay in the contract currently being negotiated, according to postal union officials.

But those officials also say they aren't about to give up a dime, and, in fact, want at least a ten percent across the board increase. They cite the Postal Service's \$616 million profit in 1983 as evidence that there is plenty of pie to cut a wedge for them.

One local president put it bluntly.

"Our rank and file says they'll accept no give-backs, no concessions. We would strike before doing that," Tom Keefe, president of the Baltimore Chapter of the American Postal Workers Union told The Washington Post.

But workers who consider striking had other news to consider late last month — only 5 states have allowed unemployment compensation to air traffic controllers who got canned after walking out, although applications were made in every state. The Rhode Island Supreme Court made it official that state authorities were right to deny the benefits to striking controllers on the grounds that they were guilty of "misconduct."

USPS RAPPED IN WRAPPED STUDY

A private consulting firm hired by the U.S. Postal Service to scrutinize its EEO promotion policies and practices has rapped the service in a final report that at least one Senator claims is being kept under wraps.

The study by the New York firm of Clark, Phipps, Clark & Harris was commissioned by USPS in May, 1982, and was supposed to look particularly at "opportunities for upward mobility of minorities and women."

The firm specializes in EEO matters.

"The total pattern of evidence obtained by this study supports the charge that there is, with few exceptions, pervasive discrimination in the promotion of minorities and women in the USPS," said the report, delivered on December 23, 1983.

Among USPS "strengths" the report found were:

- "Concrete progress in employment practices in the last twenty years."
- "Top postal management. . . have expressed commitment to the concepts of equal employment and affirmative action."
- "This commitment has been translated into a number of positive programs and procedures."

Among the positive steps the firm found were affirmative action (AA) plans, inclusion of EEO and AA in training and personnel policies and entry level recruitment efforts in minority communities.

But the report also criticized USPS, saying:

- "USPS has not given clear direction and management support to those responsible for administering the EEO/AA program."
- "Those procedures that have been introduced are not adequate for establishing and maintaining a strong, comprehensive and effective EEO/AA program."
- "The present organization and structure of the personnel management and EEO/AA functions have an adverse impact on the implementation of EEO/AA programs."

Existence of the study — a copy of which has been obtained by FPG WEEKLY NEWS UP•DATE, was broken by Federal Times pundit Bob Williams.

SEA CHIEF BACKS STEVENS RETIREMENT PLAN

David Burckman, president of the Senior Executive Association, last week urged federal executives to support efforts by Senator Ted Stevens to create a new retirement system for federal workers.

"He's a very ambitious man," said Burckman at a one day SEA conference on the issue in Crystal City, VA, near Washington. "He wants to make it so good that the rest of the federal workforce will want to join."

Stevens hasn't yet unwrapped specifics, but is holding a series of public discussions on all aspects of retirement. Any new plan would initially cover only employees hired after December 31, 1983, as a supplemental system to the social security system all such employees were brought into last year.

But observers expect to see longer term employees have the option to switch.

Burckman said any new system should be based on the best that can be found within the private sector, especially the Fortune 500 companies.

"There's lots of goodies in those plans that we don't even know about," he said, blaming ignorance and naivete as reasons for federal workers not being able to better articulate to Capitol Hill what they want in a retirement system.

To prove his point, Burckman asked the audience of executives what they wanted, what it would take to bail them out of the present system. As it turned out, few had any idea what the available options are.

"A lot of people just don't know what they want," said one participant. "They have a very regimented thinking of retiring at age 55 with 30 years service, with a fully indexed COLA. They never think about some of the other features that could make it more attractive, like unloading some of the expensive things for others that are not so expensive."

COME AND GET 'EM

The Merit Systems Protection Board says volume 13 of its "Decisions of the United States Merit Systems Protection Board" is ready.

Agencies are invited to ride the board's printing requisition #4-00131.

For more information, contact: Ada R. Kimsey, Information Services Division, Office of the Secretary, Merit Systems Protection Board, 1120 Vermont Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20419.

NO AGE DISCRIMINATION HERE

Our apologies to those who are in the age 50 through 54 year group for leaving a line out of last week's tables on the new rates or Federal Employee's Group Life Insurance Program. The new rates for the Family Optional Life Insurance (\$5,000 spouse, \$2,500 each dependent child) for this age group is \$1.10 biweekly.

Our "special offer" price of \$20.00 for one year and \$37.00 for two years for new subscribers has been extended until September 30, 1984. Current subscribers may take advantage of these special prices also by extending or renewing their subscriptions before then. Just send a copy of the address label and tell us if you want a one or two year extension.

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ETC, CALL HOME

ETC's aren't something from outer space. They're "employee transportation coordinators," and every federal facility with 100 or more full-time employees on one shift is required to have one under new regulations issued by the General Services Administration.

The new regs — which became effective May 14 — are GSA's final word on the federal ridesharing program, which is supposed to conserve fuel, cut down on traffic jams, and make it cheaper for employees to get to work.

In addition to requiring the appointment of ETC's (agencies can't avoid the requirement by "subdividing buildings, groups of buildings, or worksites"), the rules require agencies to:

- Use and promote existing programs (state, local, etc.) to match riders whenever possible. Where they don't exist, agencies must set up their own, either manual or computerized.

- Use parking assignments as incentives to promote ridesharing.

- Consider flexible work hours to promote ridesharing.
- Report annually to GSA on their ridesharing programs.

Each GSA regional office has a coordinator for the program. A list of coordinators and further information can be obtained by contacting: Federal Facility Ridesharing Program, General Services Administration (FT), Washington, DC 20406, telephone: FTS 557-1256 or (703) 557-1256.

GAO SES UP

Remember the old saw about the two biggest liars in the world — the GAO auditor who says, "I'm here to help you," and the agency chief who replies, "I'm glad to see you"? Well, there may be a little more prevarication in the world if the joke mirrors truth (on which we offer no opinion). Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-CO, has introduced a bill to relieve what GAO says is a critical shortage of SES staffpower.

The bill would allow GAO to hire 15 experts and con-

sultants at rates up to the top of GS-18 pay. GAO chief Charles A. Bowsher said most of the brainpower will go into the audit agency's review of data processing operations.

STEVENS DEFINITELY EYES TOP POST

All doubt has been dispelled about whether Alaska's Senator Ted Stevens will run for the Senate Majority Leader slot. The post is due to be vacated by Sen. Howard Baker, R-TN, who has decided to retire to the farm at the end of this term. Stevens was one of the first to move after Baker made his surprise announcement last year, but then cooled public activity. Jamie Cowen, special counsel to Stevens' civil service subcommittee, heated the matter up again by revealing his boss' intentions before a gathering of senior executives last week.

"Senator Stevens will probably kill me for saying this, but he definitely will run for majority leader," said Cowen. According to Cowen, Stevens decided to jump back into an active campaign because of the number of other Senators who are crowding into the race. Despite Stevens' popularity, Sen. Robert Dole, R-KS, is favored to replace Baker.

PROFESSIONAL MANAGER SPONSOR COMPUTER NET

The Professional Managers Association has formed a "communication-age think tank" in the form of an ongoing computer conference, known as the Government Excellence Network, or "GExNet." GExNet has been set up as part of The Meta Network, a national conferencing system. It can be accessed via local phone call from any micro-computer, communicating word processor, or computer terminal with a modem, hardware which is widely available to many government managers, according to PMA. "Many managers have recognized the potential of computers for supporting management functions like data base organization," said PMA President Lisa Carlson, "But few have had the opportunity to experience the leading edge of this technology — conferencing — which provides support for idea development, participative communication among work teams, and innovative strategies for assigning and managing projects."

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